



# The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Needs Your Support

- The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Needs \$10 million to open the program to public enrollment;
- CREP is one of the most successful voluntary, incentive-based restoration programs in the nation;
- The program addresses sedimentation, excessive nutrients and other water quality issues, and increases wildlife numbers and habitat along important natural areas;
- Every state dollar leverages four federal dollars;
- Illinois has the opportunity to leverage \$242 million in federal dollars by December 31, 2007. The federal dollars are already appropriated and set aside for Illinois.

**What is CREP?** It is a very successful partnership between federal, state, and local agencies and other agricultural and environmental organizations to piggyback incentives on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Conservation Reserve Program. It is a voluntary, incentive-based approach to water quality and habitat issues for environmental and economic benefit. USDA has \$242 million for the Illinois CREP if the state can provide its 20% match or \$58 million.

**Who is eligible?** Landowners in the Illinois River watershed owning land within the floodplain, or land that possesses wetland qualities have the opportunity to enroll in the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Meeting the eligibility requirements, the landowner can enroll in a federal CREP contract, and choose additional incentives and cost-share benefits by applying for the state conservation easements (15 year, 35 year or permanent) to restore land to native vegetation.

**What has it done for the Illinois River watershed?** Since the program began in May, 1998, 110,000 acres of floodplain have been restored and 74,000 acres have gone into state conservation easements. Over 30,000 acres of wetlands have been restored and permanently protected. The state has provided \$51 million which has leveraged \$271 million in federal dollars. **All program dollars have gone back to local economies.**

**How is the program implemented?** CREP is delivered through an innovative partnership program with federal, state and local partnerships. No new bureaucracy was created. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) provides the overall coordination for the program, but the Soil and Water Conservation Districts have the primary responsibility for implementing the state side of the program at the local level and holding the conservation easements. The Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and IDNR provide additional technical and administrative support to the Districts to implement the Program. Overall leadership is provided through an interagency/organization, the CREP Advisory Committee.

**Why have there not been new federal enrollments since November 2001?** The CREP program has not been open to new enrollment since November 2001 when the federal side ran out of acres and the state funding was exhausted. Due to the federal program cap on acreage, Illinois was limited at that time to 132,000 acres. Since Illinois could not fully fund all enrollments, USDA allowed almost 20,000 acres to be withdrawn from the program until adequate state funding was secured. Illinois did provide \$5 million in May 2004 to allow landowners with federal CREP contracts to enroll in state conservation easements held by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

**What has changed since November 2001?** The federal Farm Bill of 2002 raised the cap on program acreage and in December of 2002, USDA gave Illinois another 100,000 acres. The estimated value of the new 100,000 acres is \$250 million, \$48 million in state dollars leveraging \$202 million in federal dollars. The value of the full 120,000 acres being held by USDA for Illinois is \$300 million; \$58 million in state dollars leveraging \$242 million in federal dollars.

**Why \$10 million?** This is the minimum amount of dollars required to re-open the program. In the December 2002 Memorandum of Agreement, the available acres were to be released in 20,000 acre limits, as funding in the state was available. Illinois needs \$10 million to match the federal \$40 million for the 20,000 acres.

**What happens if the Illinois does not get \$10 million to re-open the program?** There is a huge demand for CREP acres nationwide. Other states, like Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan would like to have more acres for their active enrollments. USDA does not want to lose these acres when the Farm Bill of 2002 expires on December 31, 2007 so may need to give the acres being held by Illinois to other states who also have successful programs.

This also means that if CREP programs are included in the Farm Bill of 2007, Illinois will not be in a good position to receive future acres.